

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

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A VALIANT IGNORANCE.

By MARY ANGELA DICKENS.

Author of "Cross Currents," "A Mist of Error," "Her Inheritance," "A Social Success," "Kitty's Victim," "An Outstanding Debt," etc., etc.

CHAPTER II.

THE long railway journey from Paris to Nice was nearly over. The passengers, jaded and tired out, for the most part, after a night in the train, were beginning to rouse to a languid interest in the landscape; to become aware that dawn and the uncomfortable and unfamiliar early day had some time since given place to a fuller and maturer light; and to consult their watches, reminding themselves—or one another, as the case might be—that they were due at Nice at twelve-fifteen. The passengers were not numerous. The train had left Paris at an uncomfortable hour, and only pressing necessity, or complete indifference as to the boundary line dividing night from day, could have induced a traveller to avail himself of its departure.

Alone in one of the first-class carriages was a passenger who had accepted the situation with the most matter-of-fact indifference from first to last. He had made his arrangements for the night, with the skill and deliberation of an experienced traveller; and as the morning advanced he had composed himself, as comfortably as circumstances permitted, in a corner of his carriage, now and then casting a keen, comprehensive glance at the country through which he was being carried. These glances, however, were evidently instinctive and almost unconscious. For the most part he gazed straight before him with a preoccupied frown and a grave and anxious expression

in marked contrast with his physical imperturbability. He was a man of apparently three or four-and-thirty; tall; rather lean than thin; and very muscular-looking. His face, and the right hand from which he had pulled off the glove, were bronzed a deep red-brown, and he wore a long brown beard; but he was not otherwise remarkable-looking. His eyes, indeed, were very keen and steady, but the rest of his face conveyed the impression that they owed these characteristics rather to trained habits of material observation than to general intellectual depths; the mouth was firm and strong, but neither sensitive nor sympathetic, and the straight, well-cut nose was as distinctly too thin as the rather high forehead was too narrow. On a much-worn travelling-bag on the seat beside him, was the name Dennis Falconer.

The train steamed slowly into the station at Nice at last; the traveller stepped out on to the platform, and the shade of grave preoccupation which had touched him seemed to descend on him more heavily and all-absorbingly as he did so. He was walking down the platform, looking neither to the right nor the left, when he was stopped by a quick exclamation from a little wiry man with a shrewd, clever face who had just come into the station.

"Falconer, as I'm alive," he cried. "Well met, my boy!"

The gravity of the younger man's face relaxed for the moment into a smile of well-pleased astonishment.

"Dr. Aston!" he exclaimed. "Why, I was thinking of looking you up in London! I'd no idea you were abroad!"

The other man laughed, a very pleasant, jovial laugh.

"I'm taking a holiday," he said. "I don't know that I've any particular right to it, but I don't know these places, and I took it into my head that I should like to have a look at a Carnival in Nice. And you, my boy? Just back from Africa, you are, I know. You've come for the Carnival by way of a change, eh?"

Falconer's face altered.

"No!" he said gravely, and with a good deal of restraint. "I've not come for pleasure. Very much the reverse, I'm sorry to say."

He paused, apparently intending to say no more on the subject. But the keen, kindly interest in his hearer's face, or something magnetic about the man, influenced him in spite of himself.

"I don't know whether the facts about this bank business are known here yet," he said, "but if they are you'll understand, Aston, when I tell you that I and my old uncle are the only male relations of William Romaine's wife."

A quick flash of grave intelligence passed across Dr. Aston's face. He hesitated, and glanced dubiously at the younger man.

"When did you leave London?" he said abruptly.

"Yesterday morning," was the somewhat surprised reply.

"You've come in good time, my boy," said Dr. Aston very gravely. "Mrs. Romaine wants a relation with her if ever she did in her life. Was her husband ever a friend of yours, Dennis?"

"I have never met him. I know very little even of his wife. What is it, doctor?"

"William Romaine shot himself yesterday morning!"

A short, sharp exclamation broke from Falconer, and then there was a moment's total silence between the two men as the sudden, unspeakable horror in Falconer's face resolved itself into a shocked, almost awestruck gravity.

"I am thankful to have met you," he said at last in a low, stern voice; "and I am more than thankful that I came."

He held out his hand as he spoke, as though what he had heard impelled him to go on his way, and Dr. Aston wrung it with warm sympathy.

"We shall meet again," he said. "Let me know if I can be of any use. I am staying at the 'Français.'"

Grave and stern, but not apparently shaken or rendered nervous by the news

he had heard, or by the prospect of the meeting before him, as a sympathetic or emotional man must have been, Dennis Falconer strode out of the station. Grave and stern he reached his destination, and enquired for Mrs. Romaine. His question was answered by the proprietor himself, supplemented by half-audible ejaculations from attendant waiters, in a tone in which sympathetic interest, familiarity, and even a certain amount of resentment were inextricably blended.

Monsieur would see Madame Romaine—"cette pauvre madame," of a demeanour so beautiful, yes, even in these frightful circumstances, so beautiful and so distinguished? Monsieur had but just arrived from England—monsieur had then perhaps not heard? Monsieur was aware? He was a kinsman of madame? Monsieur would then doubtless appreciate the so great inconvenience occasioned, the hardly-to-be-reckoned damage sustained by one of the first hotels in Nice by the event? Monsieur would see madame at once? But yes, madame was visible. There was, in fact, a monsieur with her even now—an English monsieur from the English Scotland Yard. Madame had sent—But monsieur was indeed in haste.

Monsieur left no possibility of doubt on that score. The waiter, told off by a wave of the proprietor's hand on the vigorous demonstration to that effect evoked by the mention of the monsieur from Scotland Yard, had to hasten his usual pace considerably to keep ahead of those quick, firm footsteps, and it was almost breathlessly that he at last threw open a door at the end of a long corridor.

"Mr. Romaine's name is public property in connection with the affair, then, in London, since yesterday morning!"

The words, spoken in a hard, thin, woman's voice, came to Falconer's ear as the door opened; and the waiter's announcement, "A kinsman of madame," passed unheeded as he moved hastily forward into the room.

It was a small private sitting-room, evidently by no means the best in the hotel. With his back to the door stood a young man in an attitude of professional calm, which was rather belied by a certain nervous fingering of the hat he held, which seemed to say that he found his position a somewhat embarrassing one. Facing him, and indirectly facing the door, stood Mrs. Romaine.

She was dressed in black from head to

foot, but the gown she wore was one that she had had in her wardrobe—very fashionably made, with no trace of mourning about it other than its hue.

Emphasized, perhaps, by the incongruity of her conventional smartness, but a result of the past twenty-four hours, independent of any such emphasis, all the more salient points of her demeanour of the day before seemed to be accentuated into hardness. Her perfect self-possession, as she faced the young man before her—it was the man she had noticed on the previous morning questioning the waiter—was hard; her perfect freedom from any touch of emotion or agitation was hard; her face, a little sharpened and haggard, and reddened slightly about the eyelids, apparently rather from want of sleep than from tears, was very hard; her eyes, brighter than usual, and her rather thin mouth, were eloquent of bitterness rather than desolation of spirit.

She turned quickly towards the door as Falconer entered, and looked at him for an instant with an unrecognising stare. Then, as he advanced to her without speaking, and with outstretched hand, something that was almost a spasm of comprehension passed across her face, settling into a stiff little society smile.

"It is Dennis Falconer, isn't it?" she said, holding out her hand to him. "I ought to have known you at once. I am very glad to see you."

"My uncle thought—— We decided yesterday morning——"

Dennis Falconer hesitated and stopped. He was thrown out of his reckoning, taken hopelessly aback, as it were, by something so entirely unlike what he had expected as was her whole bearing; though, indeed, he had been quite unconscious of expecting anything. But Mrs. Romaine remained completely mistress of the situation.

"It is very kind of you," she said, with the same hard composure. "It was very kind of my uncle." She hesitated, hardly perceptibly, and then said, the lines about her mouth growing more bitter, "You have heard?"

Falconer bowed his head in assent, and she turned toward the young man, who had drawn a little apart during this colloquy. "This gentleman comes from Scotland Yard," she said. "Perhaps you will be so kind as to go into matters with him. I do not understand business or legal details. Mr. Falconer will represent

me," she added to the young man, who bowed with an alacrity that suggested, as did his glance at Falconer, that the prospect of conferring with a man rather than a woman was a distinct relief to him. Then, before Falconer's not very rapid mind had adjusted itself to the situation, she had bowed slightly to the young man and left the room.

CHAPTER III.

THREE days before, the name of William Romaine had been widely known and respected throughout Europe as the name of a successful and distinguished financier. Now, it was the centre of a nine-days' wonder as the name of a master swindler, detected.

A bank, established in London within the last twelve months in connection with a company offering an exceptionally high rate of interest, had suddenly suspended payment. The circumstances were so ordinary, and the explanation offered so plausible, that at first no suspicion of underhand dealings presented itself. It was in connection with the first whispers—which ran like wildfire through financial London—of something beneath the surface that it first became known that William Romaine had some connection, as yet undefined by rumour, with the bank in question; a fact hitherto quite unknown. The whisper grew with rapidity which was almost incredible even to the whisperers, into a definite and authentic shout of accusation; and with the exposure of an outline of such daring and ingenious fraud as had not been perpetrated for many a day, another fact had become public property. The exposure had been brought about by an incredibly short-sighted blunder on the part of the master mind by which the whole affair had been conceived. William Romaine's was the master mind, and William Romaine, in trying to overreach alike his dupes and his confederates, had overreached himself. His own hand had created the clue which had led eventually to the ruin of the scheme he had originated. His death, with the news of which the London Stock Exchange was ringing only a few hours after it was known in Nice, was the forfeit paid by a strong nature to which success in all its undertakings was the very salt of life.

Mrs. Romaine, on leaving the sitting-room, passed along the passages to her own room—not that which she had

entered twenty-four hours before to consult with her husband as to the pleasure expedition of the afternoon—her face and manner altering not at all. Her composure was evidently neither forced nor unreal. The emotion created in her by the tragic circumstances through which she was living was obviously not the heartbroken shame and despair naturally to be attributed to a wife so situated, but a bitter and burning repentment. Had William Romaine passed away in the ordinary course of nature, or by any violent accident, his widow would have mourned him with conventional lamentation and with a certain amount of genuine regret. He had committed suicide; had committed suicide, as the letter lying by his side revealed to his wife even while she hardly realized that he was indeed dead, as his only way of escape from the consequences of fraud on the brink of detection, and his wife's attitude to his memory under these circumstances was the natural outcome of the character of their married life.

Hermia Stirling at nineteen had been a pretty, practical, matter-of-fact girl, with her rather shallow nature somewhat prematurely matured. She had been an orphan from her babyhood, and having no near relations in England, her nineteen years of life had been lived under more varied auspices, resulting in more desultory education, moral as well as mental, than was good for her. The most impressionable of those years, however—those from fourteen to nineteen—had been passed with connections of her mother's, young and wealthy society women, with no ideas beyond society life, and with little perceptible principle but that of social expediency. Hermia was just nineteen, just cut, and taking to the life before her with the ease and zest of a born woman of the world, when one of these ladies died, and the other married and went away to America with her husband. At this juncture the girl's guardian, her father's only brother, returned from India to settle in London with his only child, a girl two years older than Hermia, and it was obvious that his home must be also Hermia's. But neither old Mr. Falconer nor his daughter had the slightest taste or capacity for fashionable life, and before she had spent six months with them the world had become to Hermia an insufferably dull and tiresome place.

She had known William Romaine in

society. He was rich, he was handsome, and he was very popular; there was that indefinable something about him—manner, magnetism, or tact—which sometimes characterises a man of his peculiar mental bent; a man to whom his fellow-creatures are only pieces in a game of skill, to be manipulated at his pleasure; and which constitutes a kind of dominating charm. He was not the less "somebody" in that he was vaguely understood to be a business man of some sort, with dealings in shares and stocks all over the world—a locality which lent a picturesque haziness to his affairs. Consequently, when he followed Hermia into her new life and asked her to marry him, she passed over the fact that he was five-and-twenty years her senior, and consented with the practical promptitude of a nature for which romance and sentiment are not. For eighteen months she and her husband had lived in a large house in Kensington, entertaining and being entertained through two brilliant seasons, which took away any girlishness which Hermia had ever possessed, and gave her qualities which she admired infinitely more. She found her husband very pleasant, very easy to live with, and after the first six months quite unexacting. His business took him into the City every day at this time, though, as his wife said, complaisantly, he was not the least like the ordinary City man; but at the end of the season which followed on the birth of their child he announced that he would have to spend certainly six months, possibly more, in America.

He showed no ardent desire to take his wife with him, and his wife had no desire whatever to go. She wanted to spend the rest of the summer at one of the fashionable health resorts, and to winter in Rome. Such an arrangement was accordingly made between them in the simplest, most matter-of-fact way, arguing no shadow of ill-will on either side; and during the four years which had elapsed since then, husband and wife had each gone his or her own way, living together when occasion served for a month or two at a time, now in London, now in Paris, now in Rome, and presumably finding the arrangement mutually satisfactory. The little boy had been left for the most part to the care of Mrs. Romaine's cousin, Frances Falconer. Mrs. Romaine regarded him with the careless, half-dormant affection of a woman to whom her child owes nothing but bare

life; to whom its arrival in the world has been rather a tiresome interlude, merely, in her round of pleasures and pursuits; who has had no time since, and has seen no occasion to make time, to give it that care which other people, as it seemed to her, could give it quite as well as she; and who is waiting, vaguely, until it shall be "grown up," to find it interesting.

That her husband's "business" had taken him in the course of those four years into every corner of the globe where the passing of money from hand to hand is elevated into a science, Mrs. Romaine knew; and with that fact her knowledge of his affairs began and ended. He made her a handsome allowance; whenever they met she found him the same handsome, rather callous, but withal fascinating man; clever with a cleverness which she could appreciate—the cleverness which made money, and held a position in society—and she had asked nothing more of him. Her regard for him—if regard that could be called which was more truly indifference—had been founded on appreciation of his success. Before failure, before the social disgrace which must be the lot of a detected swindler and suicide, it disappeared totally and instantaneously, to be replaced by a burning sense of personal outrage and insult.

It was late in the afternoon before she left her room again. Dennis Falconer received a message to the effect that Mrs. Romaine was sure that he must be tired, and begged that he would not think of her until he had lunched and rested.

When she did reappear she was in widow's weeds, and the contrast between her dress, with its tragic significance of desolation, and her face, untouched with feeling, was inexpressible.

Dennis Falconer was in the sitting-room when she entered it. His sense of duty was largely developed, and he was also keenly sensible of the moral aspect of the affair with which he was brought into such close contact. The first of these senses kept him in waiting in anticipation of the appearance of the woman for whose assistance he was there; and the second weighed so heavily upon him that the publicity of the hotel smoking-room would have been intolerable to him under the circumstances.

He rose quickly as Mrs. Romaine came in, a look of slight constraint on his face.

Dennis Falconer had no near relation,

and perhaps this absence of close ties to England had had something to do with his adoption of the life of a traveller and explorer in connection with the Royal Geographical Society. Old Mr. Falconer, Mrs. Romaine's uncle, was his second cousin only, though the younger man had been brought up to address him as uncle; but in so small a clan distant relationship counts for more than in a family where first cousins and brothers and sisters abound, and there was nothing strange to Dennis Falconer or to Mrs. Romaine in the fact of his coming to her support, even though they hardly knew one another. But Falconer had been chilled and even repelled by her manner of the morning, and he was very conscious now of having his cousin's acquaintance to make, and of approaching the process with a vague prejudice against her in his mind.

This prejudice was not dissipated by her first words, spoken with a suavity, somewhat low in pitch, truly, but with a tacit ignoring of the significance of their meeting which seemed to the man she addressed—to whom society life with its obligations and conventionalities was practically an unknown quantity—simply jarring and unsuitable.

"I hope you are rested?" she said. "I suppose, though, that to such a traveller as you are, the journey from London to Nice is nothing. I hear from Frances constantly about your exploits, and she tells me that we are to expect great things of you. What a long time it is since we met!"

She sat down as she spoke, with a hard little smile, and Falconer murmured something almost unintelligible. Thinking that his manner arose from mere embarrassment, instinct dictated to her to set him at his ease; and with no faintest comprehension of his attitude of mind she proceeded to chat to him about his own affairs, asking him questions which elicited coherent answers indeed, but answers which grew terser and sterner until she thought indifferently that her cousin was a rather heavy person. At last there came a pause; a pause during which Falconer gazed grimly and uncomfortably at the floor. And when Mrs. Romaine broke it, it was with a different tone and manner, hard and matter-of-fact.

"The detective told you more than he told me, possibly," she said. "If there is anything more for me to hear I should like to hear it. You had better, I think, read

this letter. Mr. Romaine received it yesterday morning."

She handed him that letter written on blue paper which had lain by the dead man's side, and Falconer took it in silence.

The letter was from one of William Romaine's confederates. It was the desperate letter of a desperate man who knew himself to be addressing the man to whom he was to owe ruin and disgrace. The crisis had evidently been so wholly unexpected that detection was actually imminent before the criminals recognised it as even possible. The gist of the letter was contained in the statement that before it met the eyes of the man for whom it was intended, the whole scheme would be exploded.

Falconer read it through, his face very stern. He finished it and refolded it, still in silence, and Mrs. Romaine said in a dry, thin voice:

"It bears out, as you see, what the detective no doubt told you—that there was so little ground for suspicion three days ago that he was sent out merely to watch, and without even a warrant. He found a telegram waiting for him here from his authorities yesterday morning."

"He told me so!" answered Falconer distantly and constrainedly, handing her back the letter as he spoke without comment.

"There is not the faintest possibility of hushing it up, I conclude?" she asked, in the same hard voice.

Falconer looked at her for a moment, the indefinite disapprobation of her, which had been growing in him almost with every word she said, taking form in his face in a distinct expression of reprobation.

"Not the faintest!" he said emphatically. "Nor do I see that such a possibility is in any way to be desired."

She glanced at him with a quick movement of her eyebrows. She did not speak, however, and a silence ensued between them; one of those uncomfortable silences eloquent of conscious want of sympathy. It was broken this time by Falconer, who spoke with formal politeness and restraint.

"You will wish to get away from this place as soon as possible, no doubt," he said. "There may be some slight delay before we are put into possession of the papers and other effects at present in the hands of the authorities here. But I will, of course, do all I can to hasten matters."

"Thanks!" she said. "The papers? Oh, you mean Mr. Romaine's papers!"

Are there any, do you think? A will, I suppose?"

"The will, if there is one, will be so much waste paper, I fear," said Falconer with uncompromising sternness. "There is no chance of any property being saved, even if it was possible to wish for such a thing. But there may be papers, nevertheless; in fact, no doubt there must be; and you will, of course, wish to have them."

"Yes," said Mrs. Romaine thoughtfully; "yes, of course." She paused a moment, and then added in a dry, constrained voice: "Do you mean me to understand that I am absolutely penniless?"

"Was your own money in your own hands, or in Mr. Romaine's?"

"In Mr. Romaine's."

"Then I fear there can be no doubt that such is the case."

Falconer spoke very stiffly and distantly, and Mrs. Romaine rose from her chair a little abruptly, and walked to the window. When she turned to him again it was to speak of the formalities necessary with the Nice authorities, and a few moments later the interview was ended by the appearance of dinner.

During the few days that followed, the distance between them, which that first interview established so imperceptibly but so certainly, never lessened; it grew, indeed, with their contact with one another.

To Falconer Mrs. Romaine's whole attitude of mind, her whole personality, was simply and entirely antipathetic. That a woman under such circumstances should speak, and act, and think as Mrs. Romaine spoke, and acted, and—as far as he could tell—thought; with so little sense of any but the social aspect of her husband's crime; with so little realisation of the ruin that crime had brought to hundreds of innocent people; with so little moral feeling of any kind; was in the highest degree reprehensible to him. Having assumed a mental attitude of repression, he stopped short; his perceptions were not sufficiently keen to allow of his understanding that some pity might be due also.

Suffering is not always to be estimated by the worth of the object through which it is inflicted; not often, indeed, in this world, where the sum of man's suffering is out of all proportion greater than the sum of man's spirituality. Mrs. Romaine's conception of life might be in the last degree narrow and selfish, and as such it might be in the

highest degree to be deprecated; but it was all she had, and within its limits her life was now in ruin. Her aims and ends in life might be of the poorest, and deserving of unsparring condemnation; but she had nothing beyond, and the pain of their overthrow was to her dormant sensibility not so very disproportionate to the suffering inflicted on a more sensitive organisation by the shattering of higher hopes.

Mrs. Romayne for her part found her cousin, with the reserve and formality of demeanour which the situation developed in him, simply a tiresome and uncongenial companion. He was very attentive to her. His manner, as she acknowledged to herself more than once with a heavy sigh, was excellent, and he managed her difficult and painful affairs with admirable strength and tact; she learnt in the course of those few days to respect him and depend on him, in spite of herself and even against her will. But it was not surprising that the end of their enforced dual solitude should be looked for more or less eagerly by both parties. They were almost entirely dependent on one another for companionship. Falconer, it is true, saw Dr. Aston once or twice; but of Mrs. Romayne's acquaintances not one had even left a card of condolence upon her. Neither the Birketts nor any other of the pleasure-seekers who had been so anxious for her society, showed any sign of being aware of her existence under her present circumstances.

The form taken by Falconer's first allusion to the probable limits of their detention in Nice had created in both of them, with one of those vague chains of idea which are so unaccountable and so often experienced, a tendency to think and speak of the termination of that detention, when they did speak together on the subject, as "when the papers are given up." And the papers, thus elevated into a kind of order of release, obtained in the minds of both a kind of fictitious importance on their own account. Mrs. Romayne found herself thinking about them, conjecturing about them, even dreaming about them; until at last when they were actually placed in her hand, they possessed a curious fascination for her.

It was about midday when she and Falconer returned from their final appearance before the authorities. She stood in the middle of the room holding the large, shabby despatch-box, lately handed to

her with a courteous "Papers, doubtless, madame"; the noise of the Carnival floated in at the window in striking contrast with the two sombre figures.

"I think I will go and look them over!" she said in a low, rather surprised voice. "You would like to go out, perhaps. Please don't think about me. I will spend the day quietly indoors."

He answered her courteously, and she left the room slowly, with her eyes fixed rather curiously on the despatch-box in her hand.

SKETCHES IN IVIZA.

IN the hotel of Palma, the capital of Majorca, they tried to dissuade me from visiting Iviza, the least of the three chief islands of the Balearics. But, in fact, the very arguments they used for this purpose were against them in my opinion.

"Since I can remember, señor," said the innkeeper himself, "no Englishman has taken the trouble. It is by no means the mode to go so much out of the way."

But I had a budget of literature about the islands, both from the fine club-house of Palma over the way and from the landlord's own collection; and from these writings it seemed to me that Iviza was just the place in which to get a glimpse of some primitive people. The respected writers called the islanders very hard names, and ascribed to them all the sins of the Decalogue. They were at the same time said to be extremely religious and criminal, and remarkably illiterate. In the rural districts of the island the proportion of those who can read and write was not three per cent. These various characteristics seemed to indicate an interesting people, and so I arranged to be off by the next steamer.

Further, I had before me a collection of Iviza ballads and elegies, in which the prevalent note of amorous sadness was very attractive. It recalled the poetry of Corsica and Sardinia on kindred themes. In all probability the people themselves were likely to suggest a comparison with the people of those other two large islands. At any rate, the Moorish element of Sardinia could not be so very dissimilar in its offshoots from the product of the old Moorish element in the population of Iviza.

Here is the beginning of one of these strange, sombre songs of Iviza:

"How shall I sing, my brothers, if my heart is heavy?"

"Instead of being merry, sadness has possessed me. There is also good cause why I am not what I was wont to be.

"I am very young, yet I am not married, and this, not because I despise women, but because I had not met one that pleased me.

"Now, however, that such a one has come before me, all is in vain, because her father says he does not like me. This, too, before I have asked her hand of him! Was there ever such a piece of forestalling?"

"But I cannot submit to this rebuff, nor will I believe this stony-hearted man."

As may be supposed, the lover in the end has little idea of being obstructed by "papa" in his suit.

"So long as you hold to the promise you gave me"—he declares to the maiden—"I swear to thee by Him who created me that I will keep my word."

Another song of the same kind, in which the damsel, however, appears reluctant to marry her suitor, ends very oddly. The youth passes over his heart's affairs, and magnanimously advises the girl about her own future. He ridicules the thought that she will obtain happiness by marrying another richer than himself, "for God also was poor." She is rather to be virtuous and contented:

"Let us try to lead a good life and die in holiness; then on the Judgement Day our good deeds shall be of profit to us. Do not, therefore, live carelessly. Keep the Ten Commandments, so thou mayst have God for a father, and all the saints for relatives. Let us live like Christians, and so gain heaven."

Such wooings are not of civilisation. They are the mark of a people neither wholly of the new nor the old order of things. It would be odd, indeed, if the island whence they proceeded did not offer some piquant pictures to the visitor.

The next morning at eight o'clock, therefore, I set off by the steamer from Palma's bay. The sea was still and blue. Motionless, also, were the many windmills of Palma's suburbs. The interior mountains of Majorca were an enchanting pale purple in the early light. Only the practised eye could discern in those distant diaphanous veils of vapour about the highest summits, the beginning of the thunderstorms which by ten or eleven o'clock were sure to be in full career, as they had been daily

for the last week. Long ere then, however, we should be far from them.

The steamer idled over the smooth sea on this quiet spring day, and gave us a pleasant passage. After four hours the crags of Iviza arose above the horizon. They came nearer, so that at length we could admire their fair mottling of pink and silver-grey. Of trees there seemed but few, though an infrequent pine top suggested that behind the stern coast-line there were sylvan valleys even here.

Then the city of Iviza on its bold headland showed itself and the island of Formentera, with its cape stretching near to the southern headland of Iviza. And so at length, after a ticklish little bit of navigation, we doubled another craggy headland and steered between it and a rocky spur into Iviza's harbour. We were at once in water perfectly glassy—a thorough lagoon, in which the walls and buildings of the town were reflected with startling clearness. A Russian barque and a Norwegian schooner were the only ships of size in the sequestered little place. Our steamer, though but a small one, made a fair show in the harbour.

It was easy to get ashore. Two olive-skinned boatmen rowed us to the Marina, where the houses stood three storeys high, pink and dirty white, and hung with clothes from the eaves downwards. Here, near the mouth of a black sewer, pestilential to smell, stands Iviza's hotel, unannounced to the world by aught in the nature of a sign or inscription. It looks upon the lagoon, and beyond is the green fringe of the bay, where the gardens and groves of fig and almond-trees, set with palm-trees, give a very pleasant character to the landscape. The church bell chimed the hour as we faced the landlord of the hotel and proclaimed our need of accommodation.

Now, as all the world knows, it is well to get at the civil side of a Spanish inn-keeper. He is as sensitive as a grandee, and not to be coerced into complaisance by the richest traveller in the world. I fancied I knew my duty in the matter thoroughly. But this Don John was extra punctilious; and it was only after a wearisome amount of flattery that I persuaded him to receive me for two or three days as a guest. He was afraid he might not understand me well enough, afraid I might not be content with his catering, and much else. But he was won at length, and when I broke my

fast with a tomato omelette and the native wine, his broad face showed an interest in me and my welfare for the time being that assured me that Don John had a good heart in his body.

I confessed to myself that I disliked my bedroom; but I said all manner of nice things about it to Don John. There were three of us in it, and I was to have the bed with the red counterpane, and near the petticoat hanging on the wall. The floor was positively filthy, and the amount of dirt-engendering lumber that the room contained, as well as the three beds and the petticoat, was surprising. A water-jug and basin fit for a tea-tray were shown to me; and the landlord emptied the former out of the window there and then, on the heads of the town's-folk in the street below. Of saints and martyrs in chromo-lithograph there were no fewer than seven on one wall of the room. There was also a clock, ticking loudly, and a large crucifix. You see, it was a well-occupied little bed-chamber.

I had nearly forgotten one thing else which shared this room with us. It was a tame tortoise of a very small size, and which I first discovered by accidentally kicking the poor creature hard against the wall. It did not seem to mind this misadventure, however. Nor would it submit to be expelled from our apartment. I put it gently outside more than once, bidding it seek a chamber less densely inhabited. But it would not be banished. I never entered the room without seeing it prowling forlornly about the dirty floor, or hearing it under one of the beds. In the night, too, it continued its dreary perambulation. It must have been a sort of metamorphosis of the Wandering Jew. More probably it found our room an excellent sort of larder. It certainly did, if its tastes were in the direction of fleas and earwigs.

Thus settled in the hotel, I was free to explore little Iviza. I rambled there and then up the steep streets of the city to the fort and ecclesiastical buildings on the summit of the rock, some four hundred feet above the hotel. On the way it behoved me to cross a drawbridge, and then ascend by a maze of narrow streets with high, white, small-windowed houses on either hand. The Moorish character of the city still lingers in it. Some of the pretty horse-shoe windows and slender marble columns to them, and the open arcades which sprang from the houses, were worthy of Algiers or Tunis. Flowers and

creeping plants added much to the beauty of these old Iviza houses.

Almost at every turn I came across an old church. Anciently the population of Iviza was greater than at present; or else these churches were merely monastic appanages. I was never in such dismal places of worship. To begin with, their gloom was such that at first it was necessary to grope in the aisles rather by faith than sight. Then the antique paintings on their walls and the altar decorations were so hideous and crude. To be sure, they were in many instances utterly spoiled by time and weather. But their bad drawing and colouring were still plainly discernible.

These defects were most noticeable in the side chapels. The families to which these chapels used to belong are nowadays mostly extinct. Only their flat tombstones sunk in the pavement testify by their stately heraldic bearings (Spaniards have a passion for this sort of thing) to their past magnificence. The inscription on one of them stays in my mind, and might be applied to many English families, as well as this in the chapel dedicated to Saint Domingo: "Sum qui sum, et non quod eram."

In this same church I remarked the portly size of the alms-box at the door. Instead of petitioning on behalf of the souls in purgatory, or the Holy Land—a favourite claim in the Balearics—this box was for the foundlings of Iviza. While I was looking at it I heard a faint hollow cough. I had not previously observed that the church possessed a mouldy dilapidated gallery, closely grated. Behind the grating I now remarked the pale face of a nun, and even as I peered up at her she broke into the drowsy monotonous hum of worship which characterises the conventual form of religion.

Foundlings are commonplace little mortals in Iviza. I half expected, when looking in another direction, to see the mural aperture whence the sisters of Saint Domingo were accustomed to receive these little offerings of live humanity.

Thus deviously ascending by dark portals, which opened into gloom and cobwebs, and by infrequent little shops with cooing doves in their precincts, I came upon the restricted summit "plaza," a pocket square, with the old Government house on one side of it, the church opposite, and the bishop's palace on the third side of the square. The last faced

the north, where there was a clear prospect of the housetops of Iviza, the lagoon, and the gay green gardens and fields of the interior.

Two hearty priests were here pacing between the old Government house and the church, each with a devotional book in his hand. They looked at their books, and then at the broad panorama, and anon they recurred to their books and the panorama. It seemed to me that they could not have found a more inspiring perch, whether for religious or intellectual exercises. The massive doorway of the old court-house of Iviza was worth seeing. The date, 1503, over the portal proclaimed its antiquity, as well as the fine Gothic curtain of stone beneath the date.

They have a convenient habit here in Iviza of labelling every building of importance. The stranger cannot go wrong. In England he may enter a hall of justice in the belief that it is a cathedral, or ring a bell in Grosvenor Square under the absurd fancy that the house is the British Museum. But Iviza has enamelled plates for all its edifices. Even the principal church is labelled "cathedral," and the prison, the episcopal palace, and the courts of justice are all indicated in a like manner. I wondered the great yellow-brown walls which gird the old city were not in like manner ticketed "fortifications."

This, however, is, it may be, because in spite of their enormous bulk they can no longer claim to be of much use. Of their kind I have seldom seen such walls; they give an exceedingly stern air to the houses which are unfortunate enough to stand under their shadow. One must climb on to their neglected angles and lunettes—thick in grass and flowers—and get astride one of the dismantled guns among the sheep here browsing, to thoroughly appreciate the tone of this desolation. In the evening the Iviza children play about the spaces, in no small danger of falling over the cracked battlements a hundred feet down upon a nether house top. The modern tourist may visit Iviza with a camera without imperilling his liberty. Guns and walls are all at his service, and very engaging will be some of the photographs he may thus obtain.

I stayed on the rocks of upper Iviza until the sun began to sink towards the island of Formentera. Then I descended to the unclean inn of Don John, and ate my dinner with a various company—judge and advocates, a grandee, and commercial

men. It was entertaining to learn among these Spaniards that the popular idea of an Englishman is that he is a very proud fellow.

The Iviza wine is decidedly strong. The judge, who was here for the assize, did not know which was the worse—the Iviza wine or the Iviza people. He, too, poor old gentleman, had been given a bed-fellow in his room, and he did not like it a bit. Had he had an innkeeper less high-minded than Don John to deal with, it was clear to me that he would have said a great many naughty, explosive words. As it was, he merely muttered them; and when the landlord asked him how he liked the "puchero," or the tough leg of a hen which he had just tried in vain to eat, he answered quickly that all was admirable; Iviza was charming. If only, he sighed the next minute, there were fewer rogues in the island! Then he might hope to get his judicial work over a day or two earlier.

After dinner I patrolled the dusky Marina with my cigar, and came in peril of stepping into the lagoon where the large sewer falls into it. The evening smells were very bad; they even dominated the aroma of my tobacco. But there was the romantic melody of a guitar from an upper window of Iviza, which made me less mindful of this nuisance than I might have been.

Of my two bedroom companions, one was very deaf. The other was an agreeable young merchant from Barcelona; and, presuming upon our comrade's deafness, he told me much about Iviza and the Ivicenes while we lay abed, waiting for the time when the hotel fleas had supped themselves into a state of inoffensive coma. The scraping of the tortoise and the ticking of the clock were further hindrances to sleep.

The next day broke fair and cloudless, and Don John, civil man, hobbled off to secure a carriage for me while I ate my breakfast. A Spanish breakfast is a simple meal. Here, in the Balearics, it consists of a little cup of chocolate and a peculiarly porous rich kind of bun, called an "ensaimada," which you soak in the chocolate. The ensaimadas in no two houses seemed to me alike. Some were distressingly rich, and made with olive oil of a suspicious quality. Others, on the contrary, were poverty-stricken, doughy compositions, which soon cloyed the unaccustomed palate. On the whole, the "ensaimada" is a plea-

sant feature of the table in the Balearics. For my part, I used to astonish myself by eating two of them at a sitting.

The carriage was an unpretentious two-wheeled cart, without springs, painted red, and drawn by a large-boned horse with a long mane. I did not expect much comfort from a fifty-kilometre drive in such a vehicle; but I was pleasantly disillusioned. The Iviza high road to San Juan, at the north of the island, is worthy of a larger land.

It was not a sensational excursion; but it was sufficiently instructive. I traversed the interior of the island almost from end to end. On either hand, though at varying distances, the pine-clad hills rose prettily, hiding the sea. In places they exceeded a thousand feet in height, and were dense enough, I was assured, to give fair cover to wild boar. They also served their purpose as a protection for the plainland from the rough storms of winter. This was shown by the square miles of almond-trees and fig and orange-trees which we passed. Iviza is notorious for its fruit. An immense tract was pointed out to me in process of reclamation from marsh and commonplace herbs. The almond-trees were being planted in interminable rows, and the eye rebelled against the uniformity of the tree trunks. But evidently, as my driver said, there was much money in it.

We stopped once on the way. This was at a considerable store and wine-shop, where two roads met. The thoughtful Don John had given the driver his orders on the subject. I had expressed some curiosity about the different wines of Iviza. I was here to be indulged with a special liquor, much resembling Moscatel, and which was pressed from one of Don John's own vineyards in the neighbourhood.

Then we kept straight on until we came to the foot of the hills in the north. Half-a-dozen white houses were here clustered about a white church. This was the village of San Juan. The district is so ill-taught that there is but one school for one thousand nine hundred and ninety-two boys, and one for two thousand two hundred and forty-six girls, in the parish. This average compares deplorably with the advantages even of Iviza city, where four hundred and seventy-one boys and six hundred and eighty-two girls are the numbers to each school respectively.

But I did not find San Juan so barbarous a place as this illiteracy would seem to

indicate it. On the contrary, I was struck by the ready courtesy of the black-coated little boys who came to see what our apparition meant. At the inn, too—though it is rather a store and a wine-shop—I encountered much amiability. The landlord urged me to drink as much wine as I pleased. The weather was hot, and here at San Juan the lizards were flashing about the roadway. I, therefore, drank freely. But when it came to payment, the honest man drew himself up. He would have none of it. I was a stranger; he, as a resident of San Juan, was proud to give me what little indulgence he could. So much for San Juan's backwardness in the way of civilisation.

The church was insignificant. From it I wandered into an adjacent building, which proved to be the residence of the Vicar. I asked the ill-featured dame, whom I here saw laying a table, to give me water. Straightway she sped to her master, and a moment afterwards the priest appeared and pressed me in the kindest way to share his noonday meal. The soup came in hot at the instant; there was a well-cooked ragout, fruit, cheese, and coffee. The wine, like that of the inn, was excellent. My host was not very well-informed on worldly matters—how should he be? But there was such a glow of genuine benevolence on his elderly countenance when he spoke of his life and parish that I did not wonder priestly influence in Iviza is so strong.

We drove back to Iviza in the afternoon, making a circuit to visit the village of San Eulalia on the eastern coast. This is a really charming spot—the church on a crag which must at one time have been the site of a fortress. But the road down to it was shocking. We slid over great slabs of rock, and did about as much in the way of adventurousness as was possible without upsetting. By this route we saw much grain land, as well as uncultivated heath. As a matter of fact, not less than about thirty per cent. of the island area is devoted to cereals and vegetables. Nearly as much remains untilled, and the remainder is divided between forests and fruit trees. Of the latter, carobs, figs, and almonds are in the largest proportion.

My second day in Iviza was devoted to a somewhat audacious pedestrian tour in the south of the island. I say audacious, not because of bandits or the unknown terrors of that part of the island. Oh, dear no! It was the heat, and nothing

else, which made the undertaking a bold one. But I had made up my mind, and I went through with it.

Very charming it was, too, until noon drew near. For the first three miles I skirted the sea, walking on the hard white sand of a great bay. The temptation to bathe was irresistible. I had the country far inland to myself; and afterwards, when I reached the hills where they rise by the edge jutting towards Formentera, I turned into the interior, and found myself by Iviza's most important industrial works, to wit, the saline.

There are many salines in the Mediterranean, and they are all of much the same character. You must imagine an extent of low land adjacent to the sea, and subject to inundation at high tide or spring tides. Here the salt water is detained by artificial means, and the crystals are soon secured by evaporation. The huge pyramids of salt which stand about the salines are very genuine proofs of wealth. In Iviza, for example, there was at this time a Norwegian vessel loading salt, after depositing a cargo of codfish for the consistent Catholics of the land.

There is nothing picturesque about a saline. This of Iviza, too, seemed to be more than commonly pestilential. The smells of the half dried ooze of the contiguous marshes and dykes were very bad indeed. The latter teemed with excited small green frogs. They were jumping about in the semi-consolidated mud by thousands, and croaking as nothing but a frog in the spring of the year can croak. In the distance men were at work wheeling the salt to and from the stacks. Several score of Ivicenes find good and constant employment here. Indeed, the Iviza saline is so notoriously rich a corporation that its one-pound notes—twenty-five pesetas—pass current in all the isles.

I do not forget my six-mile walk back to the city. The weather was exceedingly torrid for the time of the year. Of shelter here there was none. The white track of the indifferent road glowed with a terrible intensity. It was a day fit only for grasshoppers and lizards, both of which were much to the front. I was thus glad indeed when again I came under the shadow of the huge walls of the city and made my way, palpitating with heat, into the cool, odoriferous chamber of Don John's inn. The worthy gentleman rated me soundly for demeaning myself by going off afoot,

and summoned me to a meal with much peremptoriness.

That evening there was rejoicing at Don John's dinner-table, loud and unrestrained. The judge and his attendant advocates had got through their work. If they were to be believed they had shown but scant mercy to the poor knaves who, for their crimes, had been brought before them. They seemed to think the only way to reform Iviza was to sink it beneath the blue waves of the Mediterranean. They would have even been more content if all the felons in jail had escaped and followed the example of their more fortunate brethren in fleeing to Algiers to avoid the majesty of the law. In short, they behaved almost rudely, and made Don John twitch his lip viciously more than twice while he helped the "puchero."

The weekly steamer from Alicante was to arrive in the evening. Judge and advocates were to journey on by it to Palma. I also proposed to do the same—not exactly ill-content to leave the poor little island. But the steamer was very late, and it seemed that one might, without danger, try to get a little sleep before preparing for the brief voyage. With this intention I stumbled over the compassionate tortoise for the last time, and lay down on my bed with a cigarette between my lips. I suppose I drowsed a little, for it was not until about eleven o'clock—a late hour in Iviza—that I heard Don John's voice calling me by name, and interposing a "caramba!" or two of despair when he received no answer.

He called so loudly that he awoke my deaf friend in the bed with the green counterpane, who in his turn also shouted to me. Thus disturbed, I took my last glass of Don John's wine, paid him my bill of a dollar a day, wished him a very hearty farewell, which is likely to be eternal, and hurried down to the pier, where the last boat was just putting off. The judge was in it, with the red light of a cigar between his teeth. We were wished a pleasant voyage by several voices in the dark, and then we stole over the quiet, starlit water towards the steamer, which, six hours later, set us ashore in Palma.

"Heaven be praised!" exclaimed the judge when he landed in this city of sixty thousand inhabitants, with as many of the luxuries of civilisation as are good even for an accomplished epicure.

But for my part I think a man might do worse for himself than periodically spend a week or two in backward little Iwiza.

THE RED ROOM.

A STORY IN THREE CHAPTERS. CHAPTER I.

It was a generally known and accepted fact that there was one room at Marsden Manor which was always kept shut up, and never occupied under any press of circumstances. What made it all the stranger was that the room—it was a bedroom—was a commodious and well-situated apartment in the north wing; and yet it was never used, no one ever slept there—not even at those festal seasons when the house was fullest, and every cubic foot of accommodation was made the most of.

Lady Marsden might shake her head helplessly, and wonder where they were going to put all the people; and Sir Richard might rumple his hair, and talk vaguely of “shakedown”; but never for one moment was it suggested to make use of the Red Room.

Sometimes, perhaps, Lady Marsden would venture so far as to remark:

“What a pity it is——”

Then she generally broke off with a little shiver, and the sentence was rarely, if ever, concluded.

Sir Richard, who knew exactly what was passing through her mind, would usually reply:

“Yes, confound it! but of course it’s quite out of the question.”

And then Lady Marsden would exclaim:

“Oh, Richard!” with another shiver, and the subject would be dropped until a similar emergency arose.

The Marsdens were an old family, and Marsden Manor dated back to—well, the particular century is not material; but it was a very old house, to which such occasional additions had been made as taste or convenience called for. The Red Room, as has been already stated, was situated in the north wing. It was a large, gloomy-looking chamber, with heavy, old-fashioned furniture. There was—as might have been expected—the once inevitable four-post bedstead, together with antique bureaux and other appurtenances, all after the same style; while whatever of colour the room contained was red—deep, dark, dingy red—a red which was nearly black in some lights, and in others

showed patches of a brighter and almost ensanguined hue.

Was the room haunted then, or what was the reason that it was never called upon to shelter any of the many guests who came and went?

The Manor was an old house, and, as is the case with most old houses, had more than one story and tradition hanging about its weather-beaten walls. What, then, was the particular mystery in connection with the Red Room?

That was a secret which was known to few, or, to speak more correctly, it was perhaps really known to no one. All that even the privileged few knew was, that more than a century ago a terrible tragedy had taken place which had caused that apartment to be regarded with abhorrence, so that for many years it was shut up and never entered. Then, as time passed, and the memory of what had taken place became dim and far away, if not actually discredited, the room was swept and garnished, and once more made ready for an occupant. But only for a single night. The next morning this same individual was found to have slept his last sleep on earth. He was found lying dead upon the bed with strange marks upon him; and again the room was closed, and remained so for a long time.

Then, again, as the memory of the second tragedy became faint and blurred, or was explained away and attributed to mere natural causes, the room was prepared and taken possession of by a youthful sceptic, who snapped his fingers mentally and physically at the unseen or the supernatural, and retired to rest one night full of health and spirits. And he, too, was found dead in his bed?

Oh, no! He was alive next morning, but—well, he was never quite sane afterwards. He was found crouched in a corner, between the bed and the wall, with both hands claspings his throat, as though to protect it from something, and with several long, red, raw marks, like scratches, disfiguring his face.

He lived—or rather existed—for some years after this, being never sufficiently sensible at any time to be able to explain in any way the cause of the terrible affliction which had befallen him, nor even, until the very last, to utter a single connected sentence—and the scratches never healed.

One day the end came, and just at the last a glimmer of light appeared to penetrate the long darkened understanding.

He looked round at those who were standing near and smiled. Then a sudden unspeakable horror convulsed his countenance, and he uttered the first coherent sentence which had been known to pass his lips since he had been so sadly and strangely smitten.

"That long brown arm!" he cried.

Then he fell back shuddering and died.

This last event took place some dozen years before my story opens and before the present baronet succeeded to the title, but the memory of it still haunted the Red Room, and caused it to be shunned even by those whose acquaintance with the circumstances was of the faintest and least reliable nature.

Still the present Lady Marsden, who was a notable housewife, insisted on having the room kept aired and in some sort of order, a duty which was anything but relished by those upon whom it devolved; for it is hardly necessary to add that the fact of there being something "queer" about the Red Room was an open secret to the domestic staff at the Manor. So it went on until October having come round again, and the Manor being as usual, full of guests, Sir Richard one morning received a letter, the perusal of which caused him to knit his brows and mutter sundry exclamations, such as: "Confound it all! If I'd only known sooner! What on earth is to be done now?" etc., etc.

This same letter, the advent of which caused its recipient so much perturbation, bore the address of a London hotel and ran as follows:

"MY DEAR DICK—Here I am back again in the old country, and glad enough, too, I can tell you. After all, though, the old country would be nothing without the old friends, and there is one old friend, at least, from whom I believe I may safely reckon on receiving a welcome at any time and under any circumstances. This being the case, and bearing in mind your often repeated injunction never to wait for an invitation, I am merely sending you a line to warn you that I am about to claim your hospitality once more, and hope to be with you in a few hours from the receipt of this letter.—Very truly yours,

"HENRY VERNON."

Sir Richard read the letter through more than once, keeping up all the time a running fire of exclamations such as have been chronicled. Then, as though he

found these an altogether inadequate mode of expression, he began to swear softly.

To him entered Lady Marsden, who, at once perceiving the air to be highly charged with electricity, enquired:

"What is the matter, dear?"

"Matter enough!" exclaimed Sir Richard. "Here, read this!" thrusting the letter into her hand. "Here's my old chum, Hal Vernon, who has only just returned to England after a couple of years' absence, writes to say that we may expect him almost immediately, and not so much as a bed of any sort to offer him. It's the most confoundedly awkward and annoying business that could possibly have happened. Here am I with a house full of people, half of whom I don't care a rap for, and not a vacant hole or corner left for the oldest friend I've got. I declare I should like to take and bundle some of those chaps out neck and crop."

Lady Marsden agreed, readily enough, that it was most awkward and annoying, but was unable to see any way out of it.

"Hang it all!" went on Sir Richard. "It's all my own fault. Whatever possessed me to invite that man, Barker, who hardly knows one end of a gun from the other, in spite of his tall talk, and that young muff, Cattermole, and two or three others? I suppose I couldn't give any of 'em a hint? No, of course not. But what on earth am I to do? It's not as though it was any one else, but Vernon——"

And Sir Richard broke off and stamped about the room with vexation. Lady Marsden looked sympathetic as she handed him back the letter.

"I'm sure I am quite as much put out as you, Richard. You know Major Vernon is one of my favourites; but there is absolutely nowhere that we could put him, unless——" She looked at her husband meaningly. "But, no, of course it is of no use thinking of that," with a little shiver.

"Eh, what?" said Sir Richard, evidently struck by the same thought. "Ah, yes, of course, that would be a way out of the difficulty; but, as you say, it's quite out of the question."

He was absently turning the letter over and over in his fingers.

"I suppose there's nothing for it but to——" "Hullo! Why, what's this? A postscript, by Jove, and I never noticed it."

He read it first to himself and then aloud, the irritated expression he was

wearing gradually giving way to one of astonishment as he did so.

"By Jove," he cried, "what a singular coincidence! I suppose," addressing his wife, "that since he proposes it himself we may as well agree to it? After all, you know," waxing confident as he spoke, "I never could see any earthly reason why we should give in to an old family fable in the way we have done all along."

"No earthly reason," repeated Lady Marsden emphatically; "well, perhaps not—however, you must do as you please, but for my part——"

Here she was interrupted by one or two of the earlier risers among the guests strolling in in search of breakfast, and had to turn her attention to matters of an undoubtedly earthly tendency.

The postscript which had produced such a change in the condition of affairs was a very simple one:

"If, as is not unlikely to be the case at this particular season, you should happen to be short of house-room, pray remember that I am well accustomed to rough it, and if there should be—as I believe there is—such a thing as a haunted room at the Manor, I shall be more than satisfied with such accommodation, as I am quite sure that no ghost will care to trouble itself about an old soldier like myself."

So for the third time was the Red Room made ready, after a long interval, to receive a guest.

The two women servants who were told off to perform this duty did not bring any very great willingness to bear upon the task. Still it was done, and the room looked fairly cheerful with a fire burning upon the hearth—for the day was dull and chilly—though by the time that everything was completed it was nearly dusk. Gathering up their dusters and brushes, the maids were preparing to leave the room when one of them, turning sharply round, demanded of the other:

"What did you do that for?"

"Do what?" was the equally tart reply.

"I didn't do nothing."

"Then who was it pulled my hair?"

The two women looked at each other in silence for a few seconds; then, with one accord, hurried from the room.

Major Vernon arrived before dinner. He was a tall, bronzed, wiry-looking man, who appeared as though nothing less than a cannon-ball would make any serious impression on him. He was received by his host with as much effusion as the ave-

rage well-bred Englishman is capable of evincing—that is to say, the latter made a pump-handle of his friend's arm and remarked:

"How are you, old man? I'm most confoundedly glad to see you."

To which the other replied:

"Same to you, Dick. What sort of a bag did you make to-day?"

"Oh, fairish," was the answer; "the birds were rather wild. By-the-bye, we've given you the room you mentioned. My wife was very much against it at first, but as it was your own suggestion, and there really wasn't another vacant——"

"Good heavens, man; don't apologise!" was the interruption. "Why, what could I wish better? Besides," with a laugh, "you don't suppose this is the first time in my life I've occupied a so-called haunted chamber! I've never found my rest in the least disturbed in consequence."

A little later and the Major was inspecting his quarters by the aid of the firelight, and that of the wax candles upon his dressing-table.

"Humph! A comfortable enough room, though gloomy—a fact which may be attributed to the bedstead and the sombre character of the hangings. I wonder," with a semi-sarcastic smile, as he surveyed his surroundings, "what particular form the apparition, or whatever it may be called, takes? What's that picture?"

He strode across, candle in hand, to the fireplace, over which hung a large dark oil-painting in a massive tarnished frame. So blackened was it by time and other deteriorating agents that he had a little difficulty in making it out to be a landscape of some sort. Still, a landscape it was undoubtedly.

"Humph!" he remarked to himself again. "I thought it might have been a portrait—the portrait of the ghost who is supposed to have a fancy for this particular apartment. It seems rather a pity it should be only a landscape after all." He laughed aloud, but checked himself almost immediately. "What strange echoes there always are in these old houses," he said.

It was very late when he re-entered the room. He came in yawning.

"Confound those fellows in the smoking-room," he grumbled, "keeping me up to this hour! I shall be shooting all over the place to-morrow."

He had, for the time being, entirely forgotten the associations of the room until his eye was somehow attracted towards the

old dark oil-painting over the mantelpiece, and, sleepy as he was, was nevertheless instigated to take up the candle and again examine it.

To his amazement the light revealed to him something quite different to what he expected.

"I could have sworn it was a landscape," he exclaimed as he passed the candle backwards and forwards in front of it. "I remember saying to myself that it was a pity it was not a portrait, and, lo and behold, it is a portrait—the portrait of a woman, and a confoundedly unpleasant specimen of the sex she is, too. Foreign, I should say by the complexion, not particularly young, and with about the most malicious expression I have ever seen on any countenance."

He held the light higher.

"Look at that arm! What a long, skinny, brown-looking limb—and the hand, with those long pointed nails, is more like the claw of some bird of prey than anything human. It is very strange—very strange indeed," he mused, "for I could have taken my oath that it was a landscape earlier in the evening, and I have had nothing but one brandy and soda since dinner. Perhaps—but it's hardly likely—they may have changed the picture for some reason or other? In which case I consider it decidedly an alteration for the worse. For of all the she-devils I have ever seen depicted on canvas, this one beats the lot. Do you hear what I say, my lady?"

He nodded mockingly at the portrait, and the painted eyes glared back, while the curved fingers with their long claw-like nails seemed to make ready to strike.

He turned away yawning more than ever.

"By Jove, how sleepy I am!"

Half an hour—an hour passed, during which the dropping of the cinders in the grate and the deep breathing of the sleeper in the old four-post bedstead were the only sounds that broke the silence.

Gradually there came a change.

The fire died out upon the hearth, and as the room grew darker and darker, so the slumberer's rest became troubled, and he began to toss, and turn, and mutter incoherently.

HOMES AT THE ANTIPODES.

MOVE the island of Britain into a more equable climate; give her a purer, drier

atmosphere, soils as rich and varied, scenery as romantic, but on a grander scale; surround her with seas less stormy, but equally prolific in fish, and there you have New Zealand, which might well have been called New Britain, but for some Dutch navigator, who thus misnamed it after his dear native region of flat shores, sea-fogs, and flounders. Some, again, would compare New Zealand to Italy, which it curiously resembles in shape, only that the leg of the boot is severed from the foot, thus forming two islands with a fine stretch of inland sea between the severed portions. And, with natural topsyturviness, the north of the Pacific Italy represents the south of the European land, with volcanoes even more active, and a sub-tropical climate where flourishes a rich vegetation with all the fruits and products of the most favoured regions. The southern island—which is called the Middle Island, with as much propriety as England might be because it lies between Ireland and the Isle of Wight—boasts of a magnificent chain of mountains that rival the Alps of Northern Italy in grandeur and sublimity. And these New Zealand mountains break off on the south-west in a coast-line of the grandest features, with sounds and bays, glaciers and magnificent waterfalls, little visited and offering unexplored recesses and unconquered peaks to the adventurous mountaineer and explorer.

But here the contour of the South Island strongly suggests England on a larger scale—the east coast flat, and backed by rich, fertile plains, adapted for the growth of cereals and all the operations of agriculture, while the country gradually rises in a succession of terraces to the mountain regions of the west. The climate, too, is that of England, only drier and more genial. Winter brings frost, and sometimes a sprinkling of snow; but the frosts are not severe, and the general temperature in winter is mild and equable. There are no voracious animals—unless the rabbit be so considered—no venomous reptiles; while all the most useful and serviceable animals of Europe seem to flourish with increased vitality in their adopted country. It is above all others the country for sheep, and its rich pastures, where rich English grasses have replaced the thin natural grasses of the country, are covered with innumerable flocks.

The merino sheep occupies the higher and wilder ranges of pasture; the Lincoln

and Romney Marsh feed on the rich, moist soils; while the drier lands are occupied by the best breeds of the Leicester variety. But the land is equally well adapted, much of it, for dairy farming, and before long, perhaps, New Zealand butter will be as well known as Danish or Dorset in the English market.

The northern island has its own special and marvellous features. Here is the sanatorium of New Zealand: its region of geysers and hot springs, with waters direct from Nature's laboratory, and charged with the most powerful constituents. Surprising cures have been effected in these hot mineral-water baths. Cripples have cast away their crutches, and those arriving bent together with rheumatic pains have departed erect and sound. Here, too, is the great centre of volcanic activity, once noted for its marvellous pink and white terraces as if of alabaster, with lakes and cascades of the most fairy-like character; but since the volcanic outbreak of 1886—which swept away all these charming natural embellishments—the scene is of a more stern and gloomy character.

This, too, is the country of the Maori, who have a great reserve of land in the centre of the island, and who now seem prosperous and contented, and not likely ever to be a source of danger to European colonists, although they fought stubbornly and bravely against the English power in times gone by. Here also is the fruit country. The land about Auckland, for instance, seems to be admirably adapted for fruit culture. The olive and the vine are to be found in perfection; orange and lemon-trees flourish and furnish good crops. Where the soil is mingled with volcanic tufa, and the hills are now almost barren and valueless, there seems a promise of future vineyards to rival those of Burgundy or Languedoc.

The mineral wealth, too, of New Zealand is known to be considerable, although as yet not fully explored. Gold is plentifully distributed both in alluvial deposits and in veins in the quartz reefs, and native gold to the value of more than a million was exported in 1891. But there are also indications of future wealth in veins of copper, tin, zinc, lead, and of many other valuable ores. Extensive coal-fields are already worked to advantage, and ninety thousand pounds' worth was exported to the Australian colonies last year, although English seaborne coal is imported to a rather larger extent. A curious source of wealth,

too, is found in the Kauri gum, exported yearly to the value of nearly half a million. The kauri-tree is the native pine, from which exudes a congealed turpentine, useful for many purposes in arts and crafts generally. But the supply from growing trees is insignificant and of small commercial value. But there exist in the North Island remains of extinct forests buried beneath the soil, among which are found great masses of this strange substance, and gum-hunting is a regular occupation, the hunter armed simply with a spear for probing the ground and a spade for digging up the gum when he has found it.

Another source of wealth is the growth of a curious native *Phormium*, a plant rich in fibre, something between flax and hemp, and which is worked up in mills and freed from its sticky properties, and then exported to the value of two hundred and eighty thousand pounds annually, as material for making twine and ropes. There is fortune waiting for any one who can invent suitable machinery for the treatment of this somewhat refractory leaf.

But in dealing with New Zealand topics, mutton is monarch, and the clip of wool and the production of "freezers" make rain and fine weather there, whatever the climatic conditions. There is something slightly unfeeling in speaking of a sheep, or perhaps a lamb, alive and frisking over the herbage, as a "freezer," but that is the colonial way of designating a breed of sheep adapted for being exported in a frozen condition. To develop a perfect freezer is the ambition of the scientific stock-breeder, and excellent as is the quality of the bulk of New Zealand mutton brought to England in a frozen state, every effort is being made to attain something like perfection. The frozen meat trade has entirely come into existence within the last dozen years. Before then New Zealand might have been characterised in the Scotch manner as "a 'oo" or all wool. Sheep-farming meant the production of wool, and the carcasses of the sheep might have been classed as "waste products" to be boiled down into tallow, or boiled a trifle less into "tinned meat," with no great profit from either process. Then, in 1881 the experiment was tried of filling up a sailing vessel with freezing chambers, and exporting frozen mutton to England. The experiment proved successful, and in the face of some English prejudice, and in

spite of some costly mistakes, the trade grew and increased so that, according to the official "Handbook of New Zealand," from which most of the foregoing facts and figures have been taken, the export of frozen meat amounted in 1891 to the value of one million, one hundred and ninety-four thousand, seven hundred and twenty-four pounds.

The sheep farmer, it seems, finds that he can deliver his sheep, with a fair profit, for twopence a pound at the nearest port or freezing point. The killing and freezing process is undertaken chiefly by companies, who have established freezing stations at various convenient points along the coast, and who ship the carcasses, consigned to agents in London or elsewhere. One of the sights of the day at the Albert Docks is the arrival of one of the New Zealand Shipping Company's fine steamers, perhaps the "Tongariro" or the "Rimutaka," or some other of the fleet with the sonorous Maori names, and to see the subsequent discharge of some twenty-seven thousand carcasses each neatly wrapped in its winding-sheet of white calico. The whole year's exportation now figures to about two million frozen carcasses, and is rapidly increasing. Yet with all this depletion the number of sheep in the colony is rapidly increasing. The flocks have largely increased in number, and the export of wool has risen from about sixty-four million pounds in 1882, to a hundred and eight millions in 1891.

New Zealand, indeed, after a long period of depression, is making rapid strides in prosperity. There is no great inflation, no rapid building up of great cities—the biggest town in the whole colony shows a population under fifty thousand; but a general well-being is diffused through the whole community. New Zealand cousins turn up in London fresh and smiling. They buy grand pianos, pictures, picture-books; they go the tour of Europe. It is the shepherd-kings who are having their turn among the wonders of Egypt. But your New Zealander does not boast of his wealth, he is more likely to sigh and deplore the excesses of the rabbits among his sheep-runs.

For the rabbit is the one bitter drop in the cup of New Zealand's prosperity, the gift of the uninvited fairy which threatens to spoil all the rest. The prolific bunny is only to be kept under by unremitting energy of destruction. Everything else in the way of acclimatisation seems to have

answered well, and, after all, the rabbit is only an example of too much success. A curious instance, by the way, was the introduction of English clover, when it proved that none of the New Zealand insects were able to fertilise the flower, and English humble-bees had to be brought over for the purpose, when both bees and clover began to flourish wonderfully well. Again, amongst the curiosities of New Zealand is the rapid growth of fungus on felled timber in certain of the new bush settlements. After the trees have been cut down and the logs fired, the growth of fungus commences. It is gathered, dried, and imported to the value of from ten thousand pounds to twenty thousand pounds annually, being relished by the Chinese both as food and medicine.

Now this beautiful and fertile country of New Zealand, something larger than Great Britain, and with many natural advantages over even our own favoured land, is enjoyed by a population very little larger than that contained in the metropolitan districts of Southwark and Lambeth. The exact figures are, according to the census of 1891: New Zealand, six hundred and sixty-eight thousand six hundred and fifty-one; Southwark and Lambeth, six hundred and fourteen thousand one hundred and ninety-five. It is quite evident that there is room for a few more in New Zealand; but nobody would propose nor would the colony accept a general emigration from Southwark and Lambeth. Town-bred people would starve in such a country. But what a fine field is here presented to the depressed agriculture of the kingdom in general! How many good English farmers are weary of the hopeless task of struggling with inclement seasons, with crops failing and uncertain, with heavy burdens in all directions! Well, here is the very promised land for a farmer if he has not lost everything in the gulf of that "old Manor Farm." Even the wreck of his fortunes will ensure him comfort and competency, if not wealth. The country, no doubt, will seem strange at first. The most skilful English farmer will have a good deal to learn and unlearn. The seasons are all topsy-turvy, the ways of going about all different. Planted in an uncleared bush farm, it will seem as if rather a forester was wanted than a farmer. To fell the trees, to burn the worthless part of the timber, and to convert the forest into a grass farm by sprinkling grass seed over

the virgin soil, innocent of any preparation, or of other dressing than the burnt wood, all this will seem strange work to the practised English agriculturist, and the sight of his meadows bristling with tree-stumps will, perhaps, cause him a pang as he recalls the rich, smooth sward of the six-acre meadows on the old farm. But in a social way he will be quite at home. He may serve again as churchwarden or as deacon of his chapel. He will find good schools for his children and colleges for the more advanced, and institutions in general like those he has left behind, but in a simpler, less costly form.

For any young fellow who has some knowledge of sheep or cattle, or who is a judge of a horse, whether it be the Squire's son, the farmer's son, or the son of the village vet., there is a career to be found in New Zealand, given a fair amount of energy and steadiness of purpose.

But especially of the working population of the agricultural districts, who in England are leaving the country everywhere for the town, could the stream of emigration only be diverted to New Zealand, what a valuable class they would form, especially if established in village communities of the type which is now being established in the colonies! The skilled labourer of the fields is there in full demand; he can acquire land, too, on the easiest of terms, and form a homestead where he can end his days in comfort and plenty. And there are no frozen-out labourers in the new country; work goes on in the open air all the year round. Cattle are not housed for the winter, the mild seasons call for no special precautions against cold. There is work, too, for woodmen in the great forests, and the business of sawing up timbers is good and flourishing.

The enterprise and energy of the New Zealanders is shown in the establishment of fine lines of steamers and sailing ships. The Union Steamship Company keep up constant communication with Australia, Tasmania, and San Francisco, and the New Zealand Shipping Company runs a monthly service of steamers to and from the mother country, with passengers and mails, and always full cargoes of "freezers." A private company have an equally good monthly service, the route in both cases being to England by Cape Horn, Rio, Teneriffe, Madeira, Plymouth, Gravesend, and returning by the Cape of Good Hope. The Shipping Company have also a fine fleet of sailing vessels, which for cargo are

often more profitable than the steamers. Then there is a considerable trade round the coast and about their Pacific seas and islands. And fishing on the coast would probably prove highly remunerative were there a seafaring population to carry it on.

Nor need the English emigrant, whose labour is his only capital, fear the competition of pauper emigration, or of cheap imported coolie labour. Though New Zealand is near enough to China to be overrun with Celestials, were they allowed to settle there, the New Zealanders refuse to have them at any price. The expression is hardly correct, for on "planking down" a heavy poll-tax John Chinaman is allowed to land on New Zealand shores. Thus Chinese immigration is practically stopped, and, although about four thousand Chinese still remain in the colony, the number is gradually diminishing. Some will say that in thus excluding the Chinese we are only "sitting on the safety-valve," and that the danger of a general rush of the swarming millions of China from a country that is perishing under their feet, and the overwhelming of European civilisation by the pressure of countless myriads, is not quite a visionary danger.

But New Zealand is not quite unprepared for invasion. It has its permanent militia and a good corps of volunteers—horse and foot—with artillery, naval artillery, and engineers. Its forts are armed with thirteen-ton and five-ton Elswick guns, with other powerful guns of recent pattern, and quick-firing guns of the newest types. The volunteer field artillery are armed with breechloading Armstrong rifled guns, and a torpedo corps is kept on a permanent footing, with a good stock of Whiteheads and other torpedoes, and four Thornycroft torpedo boats for coast and river service. And doubtless the colony would give a good account of itself in case of any attempted "coup-de-main."

The colony has good roads, with a capital service of coaches between places out of the reach of railways. But two thousand miles of railways have already been constructed, and afford easy communication between the principal centres of population.

Finally, every intending emigrant should possess a copy of the New Zealand Handbook, containing a great mass of the vital statistics of the colony, and good information under almost every possible head. The miner, the farmer, the grazier, the

prospector and adventurer of every kind will find something to his purpose; and it may be had for eighteenpence from the office of the Agent-General for New Zealand, at number thirteen, Victoria Street, Westminster.

MISS LATIMER OF BRYANS.

By ELEANOR C. PRICE.

Author of "Alexia," "Red Towers," "The Little One," etc.

CHAPTER XXXIII. ONE MORE CHANCE.

ABOUT two hours later Frank Thorne pulled up his dogcart at Church Corner, and gave the signal whistle which had been agreed upon. Geoffrey came out of the house and got in behind, Frank driving cautiously off along the snowy, slippery road. Lucy, enjoying the cold night air—or early morning, rather—twisted her head in her wraps, and asked what Maggie had said about the ball. Had she enjoyed herself?

"Looked as if she did, by Jove!" mumbled Frank. "She was a popular character."

"She was very tired," Geoffrey said rather shortly. "When I asked her if she had enjoyed it, she told me to ask other people. I suppose she meant you."

"Well," Lucy said, "she looked very pretty and danced a great deal. I think it was nice of her to come home so early. Don't think I should, if I had been a girl like her. I couldn't think where she was till I heard Mr. Otto Nugent telling Miss Latimer that she was anxious, and had gone back to her grandfather. How is he to-night, Geoff?"

"I left him asleep," Geoffrey answered.

He did not seem inclined to talk; but Lucy, who had been extremely amused by the ball, and quite satisfied with the attention paid to Frank and herself, went on telling him about the people who were there. She even broke out in admiration of some of the dresses, thereby making Frank laugh, while Geoffrey, who in truth was half asleep, listened heavily. He was not conscious of any particular pleasure, though she meant to please him, when she repeated that nobody there was prettier or better dressed than Maggie. His own impression was that Maggie was unhappy, though she had told him nothing. Whatever her resolutions might have been, he

felt pretty sure that she had danced with Arthur Nugent—more than once, probably.

Lucy, for her part, had not seen much, for the whole thing was too dazzling for her rather unaccustomed head. The fact of Captain Nugent's dancing with Maggie—how many times she did not realise—seemed hardly serious enough to need repeating to Geoffrey. It might bother the poor boy for nothing, she thought; and after all, Maggie had behaved well in going home early.

"Hang it all! Arthur had better marry her," said Otto Nugent the next day when his wife called him to a consultation with his mother in the library.

He knew that this must come. The night before he had had no talk with his mother, for when he came back from seeing Maggie off she and Arthur had both disappeared. He afterwards found that she had gone to her room, having, it seemed, sent Arthur back to his duty. For he was now, apparently in his right mind, to be seen dancing with Lady Jane Fitzhugh.

That morning he had come down late, looking white, tired, and ill, with a cough now and then which drew sharp glances from his mother. But she did not interfere to stop him when he went off with Poppy and some of the others to look at the ice in the river. Alice did not go with them. She had listened with consternation to Otto's story, and they both felt that a storm was in the air, so heavy, so near, that Poppy's unshadowed face seemed a wonderful sight as she devoted herself to her younger guests and planned amusement for them.

Miss Fanny Latimer did not appear at breakfast. She had a bad nervous headache. But Otto and Alice had hardly joined Mrs. Nugent in the library, in that same warm, fire-lit corner which had been the background of a scene not many hours before, when the door opened gently and her quick step was heard. Mrs. Nugent frowned. She did not want Fanny now.

"Your mother won't agree with you," Alice had said, shaking her head and smiling, when Otto made his last rash remark.

Certainly Mrs. Nugent did not agree with him. She had no intention of allowing the favourite plan of her life to be spoiled by a foolish, wilful boy and an unprincipled, low-bred girl. Like a good general, she had thought out her campaign

in the early hours of the morning. It only remained to secure the help of Otto and Alice, and the submission of Arthur.

It was tiresome enough that, before she could say a word, Fanny Latimer should bring her trifling little presence into the library. Mrs. Nugent's first question to Otto was checked on her lips. She looked up at Fanny with eyes which spoke of anything but welcome. Otto, standing by the fire, stroked his moustache and smiled to himself, growing grave again as his keen eyes studied Miss Latimer's face. Alice was carefully examining the Japanese screen she held in her hand; but she, too, looked up startled at the first sound of Miss Latimer's voice.

"Laura, I want to speak to you about something. I am terribly distressed, and I should not have believed what was told me but for the evidence of my own eyes last night. I have mentioned it to no one—not even to Mr. Cantillon—but I must mention it to you, because you are the only person, and of course I know that Otto and Alice are the same as you. I wonder if you saw anything last night, too?"

Her eyes wandered wistfully from one face to another. There was a moment of awkward silence.

"Do you mind saying plainly what you mean, Fanny?" said Mrs. Nugent, with the extreme, distinct gentleness which sometimes marked extreme annoyance and anxiety.

This was a complication she had not expected, though she could not claim any right to be surprised, for Arthur's idiotic rashness deserved anything. But, indeed, nothing could be more serious, more alarming, than Fanny Latimer's interference. Mrs. Nugent knew that her love for Poppy was thorough and loyal. Her friendship for herself was a real thing too, no doubt; but how would it be when the two were arrayed against each other? Mrs. Nugent could hardly take refuge in flat denial of anything Fanny might say, especially in the presence of Otto and Alice. For a moment she felt extremely angry with Fanny for having produced her complaints in public, instead of speaking to her alone. Otto and Alice were not the same as herself, and Fanny had no business to suppose that they were.

However, a moment's thought reminded Mrs. Nugent that if Arthur was still to be saved, she could do nothing more impolitic than to quarrel with Fanny. Her

influence over her friend had always been strong; it must now be used to the utmost. She shrewdly guessed that Fanny found some aid to her courage, which was never very great, in the fact of Otto's and Alice's presence. She would have found it much more difficult to say what she had to say to Laura Nugent alone. And it was another good sign that she had not taken Mr. Cantillon into her confidence. That wrong-headed, enthusiastic person, who had never really liked Poppy's engagement, might at this moment have done Arthur irreparable injury; and Fanny knew that well enough.

"What have you been told, and who told you?" said Mrs. Nugent with dignity; while Miss Latimer, flushed and nervous, sat down at the farthest end of the sofa.

"It was last night, Laura," she answered in a voice which trembled, though it gained firmness as she went on. "Arch came to me while I was dressing for dinner. She told me things that surprised me—more than I can say."

"Oh! servants' gossip!" said Mrs. Nugent sharply.

She could not keep the tone of contemptuous irritation out of her voice, though she felt her own imprudence. Otto gave her a warning look. He thought that a good deal depended on his mother's management now. Alice bit her lips, glanced at Miss Latimer, and then again studied her screen.

"I have great confidence in Arch. She is more than a mere servant, and she never gossips at all," said Fanny Latimer, lifting her head. "It was her duty to tell me what she did. I suppose we are none of us suspicious; but, really, even if she had said nothing, I think Arthur's behaviour last night would have seemed to me more than strange. Poppy, of course, saw nothing. She cannot think evil. With my own ears, poor dear, I heard her ask him to dance with that girl."

Miss Latimer's voice failed.

"So did I," murmured Otto.

"Fanny," said Mrs. Nugent gravely, "be good enough to tell us what Arch told you."

"Yes; I must tell you. I came for that. It is very terrible for us all. I have never been more shocked."

So Fanny began her story, which her listeners found a little confused, though Otto saw no reason to doubt a single word of it. It went back to Arthur's first days

at Bryans—how the village people had noticed Captain Nugent in church, and that his eyes were always drawn to Miss Farrant. Then came stories of meetings, seen or only suspected, among which the keeper's story of meeting Captain Nugent at the gate of the wood held a prominent place. Next came the most recent and most striking story of all—that the day before yesterday, when Captain Nugent had walked up from the station through the snow, he had been seen by one of the grooms to stop at Church Corner, to be let in by Miss Farrant herself, while nearly an hour later a woman going to the Court had seen him come up from her garden and turn into the wood. Yesterday again he had been at Church Corner for a long time in the afternoon.

"Poppy knew of that—she sent him," said Alice hastily.

"Oh! Well, I am glad to hear it," said Miss Latimer with some coldness. "But the day before nobody knew. Poppy and I understood that the train was very late, and that he had come straight from the station. However, don't imagine that I think too much of these things. Arthur can, of course, spend his time as he pleases. Only it is most disagreeable, most horrible to me, that he should be talked about like this in Bryans, and also, I must say, that he should not have enough feeling for us all—not only for Poppy—to avoid the chance of such a thing. Of course, after last night, nobody with their eyes open can fail to see that, whether all they say is true or not, he cares for that girl and not for Poppy."

There was a dead silence. Miss Latimer had at this moment very much the best of it, for not one of Arthur's family could deny her statements, or find a word of excuse to say for him.

His mother was the first to speak.

"Arthur has been terribly foolish," she said, with a deep sigh. "I suppose, Fanny, you mean that the engagement must be broken off?"

Fanny Latimer stared. This, indeed, was going straight to the point, and she was hardly prepared for such an open admission of what was, of course, occupying her own mind. The affair must, indeed, be hopeless if such words were said by Arthur's mother. Fanny had expected fiery indignation, strong denial, absolute refusal to believe any of Mrs. Arch's stories. She was ready enough to cope

with these. This sort of resignation to the inevitable was a different matter.

"Poppy must be told, and the engagement must be broken off," Mrs. Nugent repeated in a louder tone. "Arthur is ruined. I should say he had only himself to blame, if it were not for—that girl. Well—the first thing is to get him away from this place. Otto, where is your brother?"

"Out somewhere," Otto murmured, without moving.

There was a kind of doubtful admiration in his eyes as they rested on his mother.

"It is so dreadful," sighed Fanny Latimer, leaning her head on her hand. "I can't realise it. Such an overturn of everything—and we were all so happy. It is no doing of mine, is it? Nobody can be more sorry. I suppose you had some idea, all of you. But not before last night!"

There was another pause; then Otto spoke, his mother's eyes fixed upon him in keen anxiety.

"I should be inclined to say a great deal in defence of Arthur, only that—when we were here before—I saw that he admired Miss Farrant rather more than was prudent. In fact I had some talk with him about it. He saw the force of what I said then, and I hoped he would have the sense to keep away from her in future. Apparently he is a bigger fool than I thought him; especially if this visit on the way from the station really took place. Perhaps last night—dancing with her so much"—Otto glanced at his mother—"was more natural, more excusable, I mean. It was all in public, anyhow."

"I cannot think, Otto," said Mrs. Nugent, "why you did not tell me before that there was something. It would have been better for me to know."

"I thought it over—and, as I tell you, I hoped that Arthur would come to his senses."

Alice lifted her head and looked at him, smiling.

"He talked it over with me, mamma," she said. "I thought like him that it was only a passing fancy, and that there would be terrible unhappiness if anything were said. I thought quite as much of Poppy as of him. I still think that with Poppy's goodness, and all the influence she has over him, nobody need be so very much afraid of the future."

It was boldly said, and they all thought

so. Alice's husband thought so especially, for he knew what Mrs. Nugent did not, that he had told her of that scene in the library. It was hardly to be expected that Arthur's little sister-in-law would be his bravest champion.

"Alice, you say you thought of Poppy," said Miss Fanny Latimer. "Now put yourself in Poppy's place. Would you like to marry a man who cared for you so little?"

"Yes, if I loved him, and Poppy does love Arthur. And, what is more, in spite of all this, let me tell you that I don't believe he cares for her so little. He admires her immensely. You all know that he was never so very much in love with her. It was an arranged business; and, really, I think you ought to remember how we pushed things on in Switzerland, so that he almost couldn't help proposing. Of course, dear Poppy was as innocent then as she is now. But you should consider all this before you are so immensely shocked and astonished at Arthur's flirting with a pretty girl."

Miss Fanny Latimer listened with her eyes wide open. Mrs. Nugent looked gloomily on the floor. She was grateful to Alice, and saw the full force of what she said so openly. But she knew, as none of the others did, the whole story of that Sunday afternoon when Arthur engaged himself to Poppy. "Almost couldn't help proposing" was a very mild way of describing the state of things. Now, it seemed, the result of all those schemes must be failure and punishment—unless Fanny, her old friend, who had shared in the schemes so far and so heartily, could be persuaded to give Arthur one more chance.

"Otto, what do you think?" said Fanny.

"I am inclined to agree with Alice," said Otto, but gravely, and with hesitation; for the sight of those two last night was before his eyes, and he could hear their voices speaking. If Miss Latimer had that advantage the end would be hardly doubtful, he felt.

"As for me," said Mrs. Nugent, with her eyes on Fanny, "I am in despair. I see no way out of it. It will break my heart, but that doesn't matter. Fanny, my son shall not bring possible trouble into your family. The engagement must be broken off, and the sooner the better."

Fanny made no answer at once. She sat with her head bent and her hands

clasped tightly together. Her mind was full of the question—how to break this awful change to Poppy, this crumbling ruin of the love in which she trusted? For the decision must come from her. Miss Latimer saw this more clearly than her friend did, perhaps. The Nugents must not be allowed to save their credit by letting the first step come from their side. If it must be—if this was really the end, as Arthur's mother so evidently thought—the end, which such arguments as Alice used could hardly alter or delay—why, then, Fanny bitterly regretted that she had not told everything to Mr. Cantillon before speaking to the others. He would have saved her, she thought, such a distressing scene as this; for he had almost as much right as herself to be consulted in Poppy's affairs. In the depth of her heart, too, Miss Latimer felt that the engagement ought to be broken off, and at once, at whatever cost of suffering. The mere fact of Arthur's being capable of such a flirtation made him an unworthy husband for Poppy. She had felt that last night as strongly as Mrs. Arch herself, and she felt it still, in spite of Alice and Otto; though at the same time she was terribly sorry, and almost ready herself to trust in the reformation of Arthur.

A little sound roused her. Otto and Alice were both staring blankly into the fire, probably wishing themselves out of this most awkward situation. Mrs. Nugent was crying.

In all their long friendship Fanny Latimer had never seen this sight before. Laura Nugent had been to her the incarnation of strength, courage, and calmness; a rock on which her own weaker nature had many times rested. That she should give way like any ordinary person, that real tears of grief and disappointment should be running down those fine firm cheeks, touched Fanny's heart to the quick.

"My dear Laura. My dear," she exclaimed, and hastily rising from her place, she moved close up to Mrs. Nugent and took her hand.

"Are Otto and Alice there?" said a fresh voice suddenly, and into the midst of this melancholy fireside group came Poppy in her warm coat and hat, smiling, and with a most becoming colour from the cold.

Arthur was close behind her; but as his eyes fell on his relations he retreated a step or two and muttered something

between his teeth. Were they all gone mad? Had they made up their minds to ruin him from a sense of duty? It must be so, or why should his mother, with such a deplorable face, be talking confidences to Miss Latimer? What a fool he had been to go off this morning without speaking to his mother. Surely she could not wish everything to come to smash, everything that she had arranged so carefully. Whatever Arthur might have said or thought the night before, he was hardly ready this morning to give up Bryans Court and all his future. It was heart-breaking, of course, for him and for Maggie, and it would be worse now that his people knew. But after all—

His hasty reflections were interrupted by the talk which was going on behind the screen, and he stood like a statue listening to it.

"You are not well. What is the matter?" said Poppy. "What is it, Aunt Fanny?"

Before Miss Latimer had time to answer, Mrs. Nugent was speaking.

"Quite well, dear Poppy, thank you. I am worried and unhappy. I did not mean to tell you so soon, but perhaps it is better. It is about Arthur."

Poppy turned half round. She thought Arthur was there, but did not see him.

"I was talking things over with your aunt," Mrs. Nugent went on. "He is so far from well. You must have noticed what a cough he has, and how flushed he is sometimes, and how this terrible winter tries him. Don't interrupt me, dear; let me tell you. Otto and Alice see it as I do. The doctors did say, you know, that he ought not to spend this winter in England. Now, what I should like to do is to take him straight away at once to the Riviera, and keep him there all through the horrid spring and the east winds, and bring him back quite another creature in time for—for May. That is my wish. Now you know what is worrying me. Neither of you will like the long parting; and yet—"

"He shall go, as far as I am concerned. Don't think I shall oppose it, dear Mrs.

Nugent," said Poppy after a pause. In another moment she added: "I will tell him I wish it. But will you come now, Alice—and Otto? The others are waiting. We are going to see how far we can skate down the river."

She was very pale and quite calm. Mrs. Nugent thought her a strange girl as she bent over and kissed her before leaving the room. Otto and Alice followed her, hardly even venturing to look their astonishment. Arthur had prudently slipped out before them and was found in the hall.

Then the tears rose again in Mrs. Nugent's eyes, and rolled down her cheeks.

"Now, Fanny," she said, "will you forgive me, my dear, and will you let that be true? I will speak to him so that you shall have nothing more to complain of. I promise you that. He shall alter entirely, or he shall never come back at all."

So once more the strongest and most ingenious mind had its way. Arthur Nugent's mother scored a second victory.

In three days she had left Bryans, taking her captive son with her. In another week she had carried him off to the South. Her friend, Fanny Latimer, was left with a bad conscience, with an anxiety about the future which gave her sleepless nights, and made her various irritable fancies something of a sad surprise to the faithful and affectionate Rector. And Porphyria was aware of a more vague uneasiness, rising from the shadow which hung over Arthur at his leaving, and which suggested that he was uneasy about himself.

At Church Corner he was never mentioned. Somehow, on the evening of his departure, a little note found its way to Maggie, asking her to forgive him and to forget. She crushed it in her hand and threw it into the fire. Then Geoffrey, coming into the room on one of his frequent evening visits, found her crying in almost darkness. He half suspected the reason; but tried patiently to comfort her. He was too conscious of his own straying thoughts to be very hard on Maggie, and life felt like an easier business now that Arthur Nugent was gone.

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